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Near East & South Asia

ALGERIA

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International Affairs

Haroun Received Belgian Envoy, Views Bilateral Relations

LD2202154793 Algiers APS in Arabic 1430 GMT
22 Feb 93

[Text] Algiers, 22 Feb, APS—A statement for the presidency said that Mr. Ali Haroun, Higher State Council member, today received at the site of the presidency Mr. Derk Lintz [name as received], Belgian ambassador in Algeria.

The statement pointed out that the meeting dealt with studying the situation between the two countries at the political, economic, and cultural levels, and the possibilities for developing bilateral relations.

Regional Affairs

Sympathy for Iraq Following More Raids

93AF0390F Algiers LE SOIR D'ALGERIE in French
20 Jan 93 p 6

[Article by APS: "Algeria's Concern"]

[Text] On Monday Algeria reiterated its concern and sympathy for the Iraqi people following new raids against Iraq that again hit the country's capital city, according to a statement issued by the spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following is the full text of the statement: "The new raids against Iraq, which once again hit the country's capital city and entailed the destruction of civilian targets and loss of human lives, dangerously aggravate tensions in the region. This escalation reinforces the feeling of concern already expressed recently by Algeria to representatives of the permanent member countries of the Security Council. Such recourse to the use of force is not an appropriate means of resolving differences and crises, whatever their intensity and extent."

"Algeria expresses its sympathy to the fraternal Iraqi people at a time when they are being subjected to new ordeals and sufferings, and it appeals for the exercise of restraint and for the substitution of dialogue for confrontation, with strict respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the Gulf region."

"It reiterates its call for respect for international legality by all sides, in all areas, and in all circumstances. This is the price that must be paid to establish justice, peace, stability, and security in the region and around the world."

Nationals in Libya; Consular Presence Uncertain

93AF0364B Algiers EL WATAN in French 19 Jan 93
p 11

[Article: "Disappearance of Algerians?"]

[Text] In the absence of quality clothing products, and after trying to go into the electronic appliance business, our little black marketeers have had to admit defeat and leave the initiative to the much more numerous Tunisians.

The more resourceful of them will turn to selling jewelry in Tunis or go to Misratah and get jobs at the iron and steel complex.

But some of them will be caught in the drug-trafficking trap and, not knowing the ropes and being unaware of the risks involved, will be caught in the act by the very vigilant Libyan security services. That may be the explanation for the numerous disappearances of young Algerians that some of our compatriots living in Libya have reported.

But that explanation does not seem to satisfy them, all the more, they say, because according to international law, the arrest of a foreign national by the authorities of the host country is systematically reported to the embassy or consulate representing the country of origin.

And that, according to those we spoke with, is not happening. The Algerian Ambassador to Libya, Mohamed Sebagh, says: "We have been informed of certain rumors concerning the disappearance of Algerians, but so far there are no material facts that would enable us to say that those rumors are well-founded." The Algerian community in Libya is currently the smallest of all those from African countries and even the Maghreb. According to our government, 3,000 Algerian nationals are in Libyan territory.

Over half have lived in southwestern Libya, and more precisely near the Algerian-Libyan border in the Sabha region, for dozens of years.

The absence of a consulate in those places, which are very remote from Tripoli, makes it very uncertain that we will be able to contact our compatriots and hear their grievances. The opening of an Algerian consular mission has been considered, but in the absence of an official response by Libyan authorities to the Algerian Government's request to follow through, it has not been possible so far to implement that plan.

A good many of our nationals have also reported being subjected to harassment as they passed through Tunisian border posts.

Internal Affairs

Ait Ahmed on His Absence; Political Situation

93AF0372A Algiers ALGERIE ACTUALITE in French
13-19 Jan 93 pp 10-11

[Interview with Hocine Ait Ahmed by Abdelkrim Debih, via fax between Geneva and Algiers; date not given: "After an Absence of Six Months, Ait Ahmed Speaks"—first paragraph is ALGERIE ACTUALITE introduction]

[Text] After over six months of self-imposed exile and silence, Hocine Ait Ahmed decided to break through his reserve. Refusing, as always, to listen to nasty rumors, he thus got rid of his "Dobermania," to quote his own word. Hocine Ait Ahmed chose to assess what he believes was improperly called the democratic play and an attempt at political openness. "There is no easy way, no highway to democracy. It is by struggling and learning that Algeria will build a democratic order," he proclaimed, as a man of experience addressing the Algerian people and those who

actually hold the reins of government. Here is an interview that Ait Ahmed agreed to give us, from Geneva where we were supposed to meet him. Lacking a visa, we were unable to be in Geneva on the day and time agreed; of course, the fax machine magic solved our problem. Swiss rigorousness ended up severely testing Algerian punctuality.

[Debbih] Since President Boudiaf's assassination, is your absence due, as the rumor has it, to personal problems, or is it rather the result of political considerations? Either way, we would like to know the reasons for your self-imposed exile.

[Ait Ahmed] My answer is both simple and complex. Like life itself. Simple: I left my country exactly as I went back there a little over three years ago, as a free and responsible citizen. Free, because I owe nothing to the powers that be, nor to Chadli, nor to the HCE [Higher State Council]. Free also because I am aware and jealous of my rights, including the right "to be able to leave my country and return to it." Doesn't respect for human rights begin with self-respect? It is a way of raising the point that I did not remain in Algeria in the "mood" of a Mehdi messiah, the possessor of so-called historical legitimacy. By the same token, I did not leave as a theater Don Quixote boasting a full house after battling windmills.

Responsible. In view of the restrictions imposed by the state of emergency and the military practices that paralyzed political life, I felt that my presence was not very useful. It might even have harmed the cause of democracy by appearing to support the authorities issued from the coup, especially after Mohamed Boudiaf's tragic execution.

For the past few months, I have made it a rule to remain silent, hoping that reason and intelligence would eventually prevail. Like the people, I was hoping for measures of detente and justice: the closing of detention camps, the banning of torture, the release of political prisoners, equitable trials for individuals who had recourse to violence.

Like my fellow Algerians, I was waiting for hopeful prospects at political, cultural, economic, and social level.

Instead, the government is caught in the spiral of violence that results from its determination to maintain a corrupt and corrupting system supported by a nomenclature that has been expanded to include new clients. The choice of the men who manage the country's affairs is also a tragedy. After all the trials inflicted on our people since independence, and especially after so much blood was shed, they are still trying to patch up apparatuses, to revive discredited figures who are notoriously responsible for serious failures.

The refusal to dialogue, the bipolarization of violence, the escalation of terror, the curfew, unemployment and runaway social distress, all these create a scandalous state, in the face of which I can and will no longer remain silent.

To close the subject, may I add that I do not feel at all exiled again.

I am aware of my duties. I am serene and determined.

[Debbih] Departure abroad followed by the FFS [Socialist Forces Front] decision to break the dialogue it

had started with the HCE. You seem to disapprove totally of the government's line, and therefore you will not give it the benefit of extenuating circumstances.

[Ait Ahmed] The FFS considers that the HCE perpetuates the old system which, although weakened, has remained intact. Presidents and governments come and go, but the regime remains, with its clans and the police state to guard the order established over three decades ago. What denies it the benefit of extenuating circumstances, are its own failures, the broken promises of democracy, the pretence at openness and dialogue, the restoration of the old system in a modern guise. Repression alone proves unable to solve what is an eminently political problem of legitimacy. With its accompaniment of exactions and despair, it paves the way every day for the proponents of fundamentalism, for terrorism and violence.

Today, we must tell the HCE: stop the slaughter! For Algeria's honor and for the future of its children.

[Debbih] Once again, your absence is perceived as a desertion of your party and all those who massively answered your call on 2 January 1992 "to save Algeria." Many Algerians wonder whether perhaps you failed in your duty as a patriot.

[Ait Ahmed] You are quite mistaken!

Never mind the drivel of the janissaries of the pen! Have the denigration campaigns and rumors of all kind stopped for one day since my return from exile? That did not prevent me, and does not prevent me now, from continuing my struggle for democracy. Manipulation, in the political and media sense, that is the keyword that sums up the history of the so-called democratic transition up to and including the black days of October 1988. Making people feel guilty is one of its fearsome traditional weapons. When you know the Stalinian music, when you know that accusatory hysteria is the aggressive evidence of a nagging conscience, a way of getting rid of one's own guilt, then Dobermania no longer matters! What matters is to work to ensure the triumph of the democratic project, by having society itself accept it at grassroots level. Truth, clearmindedness, education are the basis of the FFS's ethical and strategic line. We are not in the habit of lying, cheating, and despising the people. Democracy is shaky when it is granted. It becomes irreversible when the men and women of our country make it their business. I have never stopped exhorting the people to take responsibility for themselves and to beware of providential saviors. This is why the people answered my call for a demonstration on 2 January 1992. This formidable surge on behalf of democracy remains the proof that peaceful periodic change is possible. The confidence that was then granted to me constitutes both an honor and an obligation. The Algerians, men and women, know that I am not afraid to fight. Wherever I am, I am fighting to promote their hopes. They also appreciate the fact that the FFS is more present and more combative than ever, as if suddenly liberated and made more responsible by my temporary absence. The myth that it was Ait Ahmed's party collapsed. The FFS does work without Ait Ahmed, and it works well. Its collegial leadership, its members, will periodically alternate, taking turns in succession as interim general

secretary. Isn't it the leader's responsibility to train men and women that will exceed him in competence and virtue? As for lessons in patriotism, I have had enough! Thank you! I have not lived on dividends from my past until now; why should I yield today to a miserable ambition for power in the name of the fatherland. We are all aware, alas, of the sad fate reserved to the patriot Boudiaf. Sadder still is the sight of the unashamed race that followed his legacy of patriotism! Democracy, that is today's patriotism.

[Debbih] The situation in the country is still characterized by a bloody confrontation between the state and terrorists. You seem to be content to remain on the sidelines, and this surprises the democratic forces. They blame you, in particular, for not siding with the State as it is threatened by fundamentalism.

[Ait Ahmed] The FFS remains the leading actor in the struggle for democracy. That is obvious. It is facing a government that wants to maintain itself by force, and those among the fundamentalists who want to seize power by force. We now reject the bipolarization of violence, just as we used to keep denouncing laxity and the government's permanent plot to manufacture political bipolarization. We disapprove of repression because it is both intolerable and dangerous. It plays into the hands of the fundamentalists. It is a cure that is worse than the disease. It piles up the ingredients that will fuel radicalization and spread the fire: the overflow of injustice and misfortune, distress and survival reflexes, the fascination with [text missing] making it seem diabolical while making its victims seem sacred.

If the FFS does not mobilize the street as it was able to do before, it is because of the exceptional laws that have reduced to a minimum its political space and its space in the media.

When it comes to deciding who is a democrat and who is not, grassroots Algeria uses a common-sense criteria: who is supporting the government, and who is supporting the people?

Modernity does not mean society life. Dictatorship, no matter in what guise, is an anachronism. It goes counter to history; it is a throwback to prehistory and the bloodthirsty jungle, witness the Khmer Rouge, Amine Dada, and the masters of Burma.

We must realize that the intellectual terrorism practiced by former democrats is strangely similar to that of the fundamentalists. Their hysterical language leaves no room for tolerance, reflection, indignation. Even in the face of infamy and disaster.

Be that as it may, the Algerian people are immune to slogans and pretences.

[Debbih] For months, you advocated dialogue and reconciliation. Do you think that, even after interrupting the election process, the government should have continued to compose with the FIS [Islamic Salvation Front], which has been dissolved since then?

[Ait Ahmed] I don't think that we should speculate and rewrite history. At any rate, there is no easy way, no highway to democracy. It is by struggling and learning

that Algeria will build a democratic order. So let us rather talk about the future.

[Debbih] On 14 January, the HCE will announce decisions which, it seems, will clarify its objectives. Any comments?

[Ait Ahmed] The HCE decisions, on 14 January? I am skeptical as to any political openness. We have had no sign of it. On the contrary, not only has the dialogue with the parties come to a sudden end, but also blocking measures have become more numerous. Curfew, tighter control over the judiciary, journalists arrests, that augurs ill. Many have fantasized about a supposed split of the government into hawks and doves, which might lead to genuine dialogue if the doves were to win.

I believe that what we have are only variants of a single option based on security considerations and aiming to restore the authoritarian presidential regime. Obviously, I would like to be proved wrong on 14 January.

[Debbih] You consider that governments since 1962 have been illegitimate and, paradoxically, you say that Chadli's departure was a coup. Wasn't there an arrangement between Hamrouche, Chadli, and the FFS?

[Ait Ahmed] Excuse me! Actually, the first coup, both violent and muffled—the Algerian way—took place at the dawn of independence in 1962.

Shady deals, arrangements, that's not like me. I never made any with anyone. The FFS owes its credit to the transparency of its action.

Can we say that Hamrouche suited the FFS with the laws of June 1991, for instance by distributing constituencies so that each FFS deputy would be elected by 80,000 to 100,000 voters, whereas in many FLN [National Liberation Front] constituencies each deputy would represent only 3,000 to 8,000 voters?

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that Hamrouche, being sure that the FLN would win these legislative elections, did not have a strategy that was blindly hostile to the FFS to the point of choosing to have the FIS come out second. On the other hand, Ghozali was concerned about it; he, too, was assured that his proteges would triumph, and he was playing the FIS against the FFS. Was Hamrouche intelligent enough to wish to compose with the FFS which, according to the presidency's statistics, was going to win about 20 percent of the seats...was he, therefore, willing to share power?

Obviously, his successor made another choice, as he did not want to share power. The FIS was to serve him as an alibi and a foil.

As you can see, we ought to shed light on the hidden side of the strange manipulations that marked the democratic transition.

[Debbih] Your party reacted negatively to Abdesselam's program. Why? How do you expect the crisis to end? What would you propose?

[Ait Ahmed] Abdesselam as head of the government, that amounts to a provocation and a challenge to the Algerian people. His antidemocratic convictions and practices were

actually quite widespread at a time when the state was strong and enjoyed "hiba." Besides, he is the symbol of the failures resulting from stubborn bureaucratic management.

He has not changed, apparently, and he lays his cards on the table. Already, a dilatory policy of rejection of the democratic process and universal suffrage. Obviously, after his disappointing election results, he is no longer eager to go to the polls; he says we must first solve security and economic problems.

Already, he is programming the stifling of private enterprises, a leaden austerity that would worsen economic conditions and might lead to riots. Already, he is making the courts and the press toe the line. Practically all over the world, bureaucratic planning and state interventionism have failed. By what miracle does Abdesselam expect to have them succeed in Algeria? Is he out to prove that the severe criticisms that his government received during the seventies were not warranted? Even if that means ruining the country some more and starving the poor? Abdesselam must go.

A neutral transition government must be formed to prepare truly free, truly loyal, seriously clean elections. We must tackle the legitimacy problem, as soon as possible, today, right now.

This is what the FFS proposes to get out of the crisis.

[Debbih] After rejecting any Army involvement in the country's political affairs, the FFS seems finally to agree that the military institution should act as a referee within the framework of the transition government advocated by the FFS. Why?

[Ait Ahmed] The military institution is going through a difficult stage. Having stepped back in 1988, when it withdrew from the FLN, it now has much less room to maneuver; the fiction of a nonpolitical army is gone; the army looks like the principal, if not the decisive actor in political life. It is the only genuine and still credible decision center; a shift of the HCE's power toward the military institution has occurred because the HCE lacks weight and cohesion. Will the army continue to manage personal struggles? Will it continue to act as a referee when power changes hands and is allocated among clans? Will it be seduced by the reactionary trend that toys with modernity in drawing rooms? Or will it attempt to make the grade by helping resume the transition to democracy?

In this case, the Army must break out of its political and institutional isolation and work for a historical compromise, so that together we can save our country's unity, its sovereignty, and its considerable development assets. Eventually, the Army should accept a measure of subordination to the political power; in exchange, it would retain its prerogatives as far as its internal organization is concerned.

For the moment, we should overlook nothing that could help restore and strengthen civil peace. It was an emergency; it is a demand of Algerian men and women to turn the page of despair and ensure that no Algerian man or woman is left at the door of the city.

[Debbih] When do you plan to come back home?

[Ait Ahmed] The political evolution of the FFS leadership will decide as to the date of my return.

Firms, Banks Consider Private Police

93AF0396A Algiers EL WATAN in French 23 Jan 93 p 2

[Article by Omar Kharoum and Leila Albane: "Security: Will There Soon Be Private Police?"]

[Text] *Some time this year will we see the start of a so-called private police force developing outside official security structures? That notion was advanced last Thursday by Mr. Mohamed Meghlaoui, Algiers's principal wali, in the course of a discussion with journalists of the national press corps at the headquarters of the CPVA [People's Council of the City of Algiers].*

That initiative, put forward at an exhibit of security equipment, comes in response to a current concern to protect property and people from ill-disposed actions.

Indeed, current economic conditions make it important for us to acquire the best [possible] means to draw attention to the security aspect of the only prerogative of traditional services for the maintenance of order and citizen protection.

The wali of Algiers had in fact suggested, in an interview he granted to our daily newspaper more than a month ago, the need to reinvent various structures with an eye towards putting discipline back into different sectors affecting city life (city planning, commerce, hygiene, etc.), although initially a coercive element would not enter into the picture.

So the creation by certain agencies (banks, businesses, various collectors' offices, etc.) of a private police force whose legal presence will be defined in the future, is a response to a deterrent background, which would complement the traditional security apparatus, which, it must be admitted, is not sufficient by itself given the current circumstances.

Every day crimes are committed against public establishments and sums [of money] stolen without the perpetrators of those acts becoming terribly worried, given the lack of modern security equipment or the lack of an agency within these agencies that would deal with this issue, or lacking the traditional runner or the hypothetical night watchman whose nocturnal presence no longer deters armed perpetrators from operating quite calmly.

So businesses and financial institutions will be called on to make an effort in this area, in particular by acquiring the proper equipment (alarm system, cameras, electronic searches in entryways, the automatic closure of doors, etc.), but they will also be called on to create budget lines for officers equipped with the necessary "instruments" so as to generate a "deterrent" presence in house.

Furthermore, the wali of Algiers stated in this regard that the financial fallout of such a move would be partly assumed by the wilaya's budget, although he did not specify what sort of help this would be or to whom it would be given.

This meeting of the press and wilaya authorities provided the opportunity for certain private concessionaires to display state-of-the-art equipment in the area of security and provide information on its use, operation, and cost.

Recently the Egyptian authorities began a similar program, in particular by setting up private armed surveillance structures that, they say, ensure the security of banking institutions with great efficiency.

In our country, and as we wait for the legal framework to be set up for this type of activity, this notion seems to be making some headway.

Fundamentalist Movement; Use of Military

93AF0364A Algiers LIBERTE in French 12 Jan 93 p 7

[Interview with Said Sadi, head of the government under President Mohamed Boudiaf, by EL WATAN EL ARABI; place and date not given: "Said Sadi: 'Army Will Not Take Power Directly'"]

[Text] *Said Sadi was chosen by the late President Mohamed Boudiaf to head a government of technocrats capable of dealing with corruption, adding more efficiency to administrative work, and developing the economy. The assassination deprived Sadi of the chance to eject the old guard from power.*

[EL WATAN EL ARABI] Observers have noted that the military solution by itself has not brought the expected results. Since the fact is that the fundamentalist phenomenon in Algeria has economic and social dimensions, doesn't a continuation of the current policy threaten national union?

[Sadi] Any state, regardless of its nature, that sees itself threatened by acts of violence has the duty to work to restore security and peace, even if doing so requires the use of force. Nevertheless, recourse to force must take place solely within the framework of the law.

As far as the fundamentalist trend in Algeria is concerned, it would be fair to say that restoration of the state's authority is only a preliminary operation leading up to an effective solution. What needs to be realized is that extremism in Algeria is not a product of society but issues instead from the structures of the state itself. The schools, the various media, the system on which the mosques are founded, the judicial apparatus, and to some extent the favorable international climate—all those factors form a source for the appearance of a violent Islam differing completely from the Islam that has prevailed in Algeria and the Maghreb countries until now. The extremist leadership has not mobilized the common people; instead, it has taken advantage of the general disapproval within Algerian society following the government's failure in various areas since independence was achieved in 1962. So the only way to put an end to the current crisis is to focus our efforts on two areas: the political and the economic, each of which must be renewed and modernized. Those two areas, in fact, constitute the proper choice for dealing with a government that has been corrupted by regionalism and the clan spirit.

We were the first to talk about a radical break with the government in power, and we did so back in 1991.

The causes of the tension and the acts of violence being experienced by the country today are not a direct threat to national unity because the causes and factors in question are leading to a confrontation between the supporters of populism and the forces of progress and renewal. We are not facing a conflict related to a regional or ethnic spirit.

[EL WATAN EL ARABI] The government and those in power have been incapable so far of exterminating the armed fundamentalist movement. Were their calculations incorrect to start with? What precisely is the structure of those groups, and who are their leaders?

[Sadi] Combating terrorism is always difficult. For one thing, the terrorist enjoys freedom of action, and for another, the state must necessarily react to that action while complying with the relevant legislation. Let us remember how long it took a country like Germany to render the Baader-Meinhof gang harmless despite all the resources available to it and the time it took for Italy to win its war against the "Red Brigade."

Today we have a better understanding of the social factors leading to the emergence of armed groups in Algeria. In most cases, the rank and file consists of unemployed young people who are mobilized locally or after being sent to Afghanistan, Iran, or Sudan for military training. What develops among those young people, who are manipulated and directed toward a very specific objective, is a violent rejection of anything new and progressive, as though they wanted to work to obliterate it.

Modern society has not recognized them or called upon them to play an elite role. In most cases their leaders are older than they are. They rarely have much of an education, and their religious culture is very limited. They therefore try to make up for those deficiencies by total religious commitment. One sees them unabashedly calling themselves "emir," and they wind up believing that they have genuine power and authority. It must be expected that such people will commit themselves completely to carrying out the missions entrusted to them, since they know that doing so wins them more prestige. In fact, they use the term "chahid" [martyr] to describe someone who gives his life for the cause.

[EL WATAN EL ARABI] It is obvious that the recent military deployment in seven governorates has placed Algeria in a critical political situation and wrecked the pluralist political experience. Is the Algerian situation going to slide toward government by the generals behind the military venture?

[Sadi] It seems that the citizens have accepted the curfew situation with understanding. It needs to be pointed out that Algerians long ago lost the habit of going out at night, the reason being living conditions characterized by social and cultural poverty. The so-called pluralist experience has rarely been expressed at night. The greater danger is that of the appearance of acts of violence, something that can always happen, and of a government takeover of the media, which would prevent the parties from expressing themselves politically.

POLITICAL

At the moment, it does not seem that the Algerian Army is seeking to take power directly. It seems to me that there is a certain awareness of world developments as this century ends, developments that have condemned the majority of the military regimes existing in the political arena. To reduce the intensity of the pressure on the Army, there needs to be a radical change in the current political system.

[EL WATAN EL ARABI] Do you think that the military institution is capable of containing the fundamentalist upheaval indefinitely without affecting people in high places, senior officers, and the rank and file?

[Sadi] The leadership of the Algerian Army consists of young republican officers who have proven their nationalism and devotion. The Army is a stable institution which, in addition to its role and the requirements of its mission, is moving toward progress and renewal.

[EL WATAN EL ARABI] In certain periods France has been criticized for its support of the fundamentalists. Does that support still exist?

[Sadi] France has been trying since the beginning of the national movement to encourage the emergence of populist groups to stop the radical movement toward Algeria's progress and liberation. It seems that some French official authorities lean toward support of the Islamic movement. Despite that, there is not enough information at present to enable us to assess the level of that support. But it seems that over the past few months, France has more or less reconsidered its former commitment, the purpose being to impose a political solution to the situation in Algeria. What it was proposing was in fact a kind of populist "mixture" involving fundamentalists, members of the single party, and members of the Socialist Forces Front.

Arrests, Arms Seizures in Setif, Batna

LD2602111693 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic
0700 GMT 26 Feb 93

[Text] It was learned yesterday from the National Gendarmerie command that 14 people have been arrested and that 12 automatic pistols, two locally made rifles, and many rounds of ammunition have been seized. The arrests and the seizure of weapons took place last Tuesday and Wednesday [23-24 February] in many regions of Setif Province following investigations that recently led to the breaking up of the biggest gang trading in arms since independence, which had branches in many provinces.

In the same context, National Gendarmerie units during this week arrested 24 people and seized 34 pistols in M'Sila, two locally made pistols, and 18 automatic pistols in Tiaret. They also arrested six people in Batna Province.

Tighter Passport Controls Expected

93AF0390A Algiers EL WATAN in French 20 Jan 93
pp 1, 3

[Article by Omar Berbiche: "Alarming Traffic in Passports"]

[Text] Algerian passports seem to be highly prized overseas. Several weeks ago the French press reported the arrest in Paris of two Iranian nationals carrying Algerian passports. A

few days ago, Iranian nationals in possession of Algerian travel documents were apprehended in Stockholm.

The passports were stolen from our embassy in Kuwait during the Gulf war. In certain European capitals such as London, the green passport can fetch a high price. In short, trafficking in passports is a reality difficult to ignore these days. The phenomenon is all the more disturbing because its repercussions extend beyond our borders.

"Applications for passport renewal have picked up alarmingly": So says Mr. Amrane, an administrative officer in the general directorate for national security [DGSN]. With [promulgation of] the February 1989 constitution, which enshrined the principle of freedom of individual movement, the formerly strict conditions for passport issuance were all at once relaxed to the point they amounted to little more than formalities. The consequence: Investigative bureaus at the daira level and the DGSN, which are required to provide a security report based on their investigation, have been overwhelmed by the flood of applications for new and renewed passports. In the month of November alone, these bureaus handled nearly 6,000 passport renewal applications from all over the country.

That's the price of democracy! But this new openness has brought with it some reprehensible practices such as trafficking in passports, sometimes in the form of submission of fraudulent reports of lost travel documents, a practice whose incidence is beginning to assume disturbing proportions, according to DGSN officials.

Trafficking in passports is not something new. The green document has been modified no fewer than three times since 1982 in an effort to thwart counterfeiters. The first change was made back in the early 1980s and simply consisted of replacing the bulky older passport with today's smaller document.

It took only six months to prepare another modification, which consisted of laminating the pages reserved for identification of the passport holder, in order to discourage potential traffickers.

The results apparently failed to measure up to the expectations of the services involved: A further modification was introduced several years later. The lamination was kept, but a special seal was affixed to the identification photograph.

According to DGSN sources, passport trafficking dates back to the 1981-82 liberalization of foreign travel, when the practice of requiring exit permits was dropped. Overseas trafficking in Algerian passports increased steadily through the 1980s, a phenomenon that DGSN officials attribute to Algeria's reputation in the international community. Police at international borders considered the Algerian passport a kind of moral endorsement of the bearer. Times have changed a lot since then.

How can the practice be thwarted without infringing on individual liberties, including the freedom of movement clearly guaranteed in the February 1989 constitution?

The phenomenon became so widespread that action was taken in 1987 to try to get some upstream control of passports, by refusing to issue them to persons whose circumstances made it impossible for DGSN to attest to their good character—young men and women without employment, for example. The objective, we are told, was merely to protect Algeria's image overseas. Regardless of the innocuous reasons advanced for imposing these restrictions, they were unpopular and attacked as illegal, because how could it be reasonable to penalize a young person for the "crime" of being unemployed? Sources at the DGSN, which takes pains to show it is in strict compliance with the law, say applications have always been considered on a case by case basis in order not to deprive anyone of his rights. These restrictions lasted only a short time.

With the approval of the 1989 constitution, which guaranteed freedom of movement to all citizens except in specific circumstances provided in the law—in cases of crime, for example, where the criminal is denied the right to a passport for a five-year period—the restrictions imposed by authorities in an effort to maintain tighter control over issuance of the green book and protect Algeria's image overseas went out the window. Henceforth, citizens were entitled to a passport. Administrative authorities and police agencies could refuse to issue a passport only on specific grounds provided for by law.

This situation, DGSN officials acknowledge, opened the way to certain practices that feed a quasi-legal practice that authorities are powerless to stop. Declarations of lost passports, although in many cases fictitious, are a legal means of defeating the law, officials explain. Police are always suspicious of passports filled with visas the bearer should not be in a position to obtain, or marked to show the bearer has been expelled or deported from a foreign country.

Restrictions?

Hence the recourse to a declaration of loss, the only way to obtain a new passport without having to explain anything. DGSN officials readily admit they are at their wits' end. In the month of November alone, 1,571 declarations of lost or damaged passport were reported by police bureaus, including 239 in the wilaya of Algiers. The problem has become equally prevalent at our diplomatic missions abroad. In the month of November, 375 declarations of loss and seven of damage were reported in various countries where our nationals have resettled: France, Great Britain, Spain, Egypt, Libya...

DGSN officials say they are well aware that many of the reports of lost or damaged passports that reach their bureaus are false, but fraud is difficult to prove. In the past, before the liberalization of exit permits, anyone who lost his passport was penalized by being forced to wait two years to be eligible for a new passport.

However that may be, compared to its neighbors Algeria certainly holds the record for volume of passports issued: Nearly 12,000 passport applications were processed by DGSN bureaus between 1 September 1987 and 30 November 1992.

Can a passport be falsified? From DGSN's perspective, much depends on the perspicacity of the police agents responsible for controlling departures and arrivals at ports, airports, and border crossings. Also, certain airport areas are fitted up with equipment to detect counterfeit or falsified passports.

So many lost passport reports and passport applications have been handled by police investigators in recent years that a DGSN working group has been formed to come up with ways and means to suppress the phenomenon of trafficking. Proposals to this end have been submitted to the authorities, say DGSN sources, who nevertheless are tight-lipped about what steps might eventually be taken in this domain. They limit themselves to promising police will ensure strict enforcement of the law.

Will there be a return to the travel restrictions on unemployed youths that prevailed before the February 1989 constitution? Are we moving toward the reinstitution of exit permits to keep closer tabs on persons intending to travel abroad?

While the second option is difficult to imagine—not to say utterly preposterous—in today's Algeria, it is not out of the question that administrative measures to regulate foreign travel could be imposed in the coming weeks, given the level of concern over this issue.

Opposition Responds to HCE Program

93AF0364C *Algiers EL WATAN* in French 17 Jan 93
p 3

[Article by Mohammed Larbi: "Hesitant Opposition"]

[Excerpt] [Passage omitted] The al-Nahdah Party is critical of the HCE [Higher State Council] plan, the MDA [Algerian Movement for Democracy] considers it inadequate, and the MAJD [Algerian Movement for Justice and Democracy] feels that Ali Kafi's speech does not include "any clear and precise commitment." In announcing the continuation of discussions with the opposition, he found it difficult to set a timetable because, he said, the upcoming meetings "will be concerned with basic problems and will enable each partner to specify his strategy in terms of the higher interests of the nation." And excluded from those consultations are "all those who practice or advocate violence as a means of achieving power." Does this mean that parties pledging to abide by the principles contained in that speech will be accepted, even though only five groups have been invited to participate since last 21 September? The question deserves to be asked, because again it is a question of a consensus for getting the country out of the crisis, and Ali Kafi is calling for the formation of "a broad political base for renewing the national project." When all is said and done, it is a call being issued to the opposition to join with the government to ensure the transition. But on the other hand, it is natural, after all, that the political parties should be displaying the kind of reserve that is proper to all opposition groups. And that reserve becomes synonymous with definite distrust when it is recalled that some of them are challenging the HCE, while others regard it as a de facto government. That explains their caution when it comes to allying themselves

with it or simply against it. In short, it is the government which, in one way or another, is being challenged to go beyond communiquees and statements of intention.

Al-Nahdah: Surprise

The Islamic al-Nahdah movement has issued a communique saying that public opinion and the various political associations and categories of society, which were waiting for 14 January 1993, "were surprised to see the policy of 1992 confirmed by the announcement of an upcoming constitutional revision to confer an official character on the policies and institutions that have been in place since 14 January 1992." The communique adds that public opinion and the various political associations and categories of society "were waiting for 14 January 1993 in the great hope of seeing an end to the correcting of mistakes by more mistakes, the policy of violating the Constitution, political exclusion, social and economic injustice, and the episode of violence and a solution of the problem of legality and legitimacy as well as that of public rights and duties."

Al-Nahdah feels that 14 January 1992 "is a date that will remain engraved in Algerians' memories as the day when an actual step was taken toward establishing a dangerous precedent in power and management." In conclusion, al-Nahdah emphasizes: "The persistence in scorning this people, imposing paternalistic tutelage on it, and using its religion, authenticity, and political and revolutionary past to achieve power is not helping to get us out of the current crisis rapidly, effectively, and in a radical manner."

MDA: Too Little

The MDA (Algerian Movement for Democracy) says in a communique that "the speech by the president of the HCE was far from meeting the expectations of the Algerian people.

"No credible answer to the most serious questions was advanced. For the sake of the country's stability, we would like to have seen national reconciliation—the guarantee of a return to calm and of reassurance for the people—adopted in preference to violence as a solution to our problems."

According to former President Ahmed Ben Bella's party, [as regards] "the continuation of the democratic process as reaffirmed by the president of the HCE, we would like to have seen it go farther than a profession of faith and to have seen in it a specific content, meaning dialogue with political figures and people's associations and organizations concerning management of the transitional period and a debate with the political class aimed at producing a national consensus on matters involving the country's future."

Concerning the proposed referendum on revision of the Constitution, the MDA "considers that we feel that in view of the seriousness of the situation, it would be more appropriate to correct the gap in the government's legitimacy than to undertake a constitutional revision that cannot possibly constitute either the saving effort so hoped for by the Algerians or a means of mobilizing the country's energies for getting out of the multidimensional crisis it is experiencing."

FLN: Questions Left Unanswered

Pending the more detailed statement that it has promised to issue in days to come, the Political Bureau of the FLN [National Liberation Front] notes in a communique that:

"1. The resumption of dialogue with the political and social forces and a return to popular elections remain limited and indefinite."

"2. The High State Committee has decided certain basic matters and left unanswered other questions which will be submitted to debate with the political and social forces."

"3. The seriousness of the questions at issue requires that they be thoroughly examined in the light of the FLN's memorandum and of the proposals by the other parties."

PAGS: Only a New Constitution

The Socialist Vanguard Party (PAGS) affirms "the need for a new Constitution whose drafting and implementation necessarily call for the emergence of new political and state institutions."

The PAGS Political Bureau feels that those new institutions must meet the "requirements for the necessary ruptures and for the implementation of a new plan for society."

"Only a new Constitution reflecting the plan for a modern, democratic, and mutually supportive society" is "capable of giving concrete and symbolic expression to such a radical rupture, which is more necessary than ever," says the PAGS, which feels that "amendments to the 1989 Constitution, no matter how appropriate they may be, cannot possibly ensure that radical rupture with the old system." At the same time, the PAGS feels that the speech by Ali Kafi, president of the Higher State Council, provides "real clarifications regarding the management of the transitional period and the major tasks that must be carried out during that period."

RCD: Tactical Hesitations

(APS)—The RCD (Rally for Culture and Democracy) feels that "announcement of the principle of a referendum on the Constitution without specifying a date and the points to be amended is too vague to be a satisfactory response to the demand for the rupture expected by the citizens." In a communique issued on Thursday following the speech by Ali Kafi, president of the HCE, the RCD says that the fact that the HCE's program lacks a "timetable for the rest of its life" leaves the "way open to speculation of all kinds" because of "possible disagreements at the top, a lack of clear-sightedness" and "tactical hesitations." The RCD draws attention, however, to one positive feature: "the government's firm will to protect the republican state and respect the democratic option, that being the only solution worthy of the national movement and of November 1954." In conclusion, the RCD says: "More than ever, the rupture depends on the initiative of republican patriots, within whose ranks active Algeria must play the leading roles."

UNEP: Positive Overall, But...

"The speech delivered by the president of the Higher State Council, while positive overall, nevertheless raises

a number of questions," says the leadership of the UNEP (National Union of Public Entrepreneurs).

It is "positive overall in the sense, first of all, that it reaffirms a permanent will, as proven in the field, to eradicate terrorism and the conditions giving rise to the latter and introduces the imperative need to establish a transitional period, and, second, that it reaffirms the democratic and republican nature of the state."

"On the subject of questions, the party's main reservation has to do with the absence of any reference to the economic world. On that point, it must be noted that the practices of centralized economic interventionism are being gradually introduced on the pretext of necessity and economic efficiency. In fact, it appears that we are moving toward a fundamental questioning of the economic reforms."

Ex-SIT Infiltration in UGTA Alleged

*93AF0390C Algiers ALGER REPUBLICAIN in French
25 Jan 93 pp 1, 3*

[Article by H.S.: "Efforts To Infiltrate UGTA"]

[Text] Fundamentalists no longer able to hide behind their criminal "front," the now-dissolved SIT [Islamic Labor Syndicate], are again trying to infiltrate the UGTA [National Union of Algerian Workers], that loyal bastion of patriotism. A few examples will shed light on the problem.

The laxity of managers at some enterprises and the complicity of several maggoty UGTA trade unions have facilitated the redeployment of SIT elements.

The negative role played by fundamentalists acting in the name of the UGTA has brought a strong reaction from the labor central and in some cases from workers themselves. The most recent development was the exclusion of a member of the ex-SIT who used his position as secretary of a UGTA trade-union local to provide housing for himself and other elements of the dissolved FIS [Islamic Salvation Front].

In a letter to the interior minister, the refuse disposal and cleaning service local of the Algiers CPVA [People's Council of the City of Algiers] has accused members of the UGTA union of Algiers wilaya of "introducing SIT elements into the UGTA." The local says the CPVA is being destabilized by the presence of "counterfeit unionists."

Another individual, a union local official in the Sidi M'Hamed subdivision of the cleaning service (Algiers), was named as an accomplice of this "conspiracy" directed primarily against UGTA and workers in the sector.

Condemning these provocations, the six unionists called on the authorities to put an end to the activities of these accomplices of the fundamentalists.

One company, the Algiers Building Enterprise, came close to being seriously destabilized by fundamentalists working through the UGTA. The UGTA's enterprise bureau, made up mostly of ex-FIS elements, publicly condemned the courageous stands taken by the labor central, which had joined the National Committee to Safeguard Algeria (CNSA).

Reacting strongly to these "provocations," UGTA's national secretariat put an end to the local's activities.

At SONELGAZ [National Electricity and Gas Company], laxity on the part of certain officials allowed SIT elements to redeploy. Management negotiated with the syndicate even though it had been banned by the government. This gave enhanced legitimacy to the organization, most of whose members have turned out to be bomb throwers. Laxity is shown by the fact that even though management has decided no longer to recognize the syndicate, SIT's offices are still intact, with its fundamentalist slogans posted up on the walls.

How far will this laxity, this insult to the victims of terrorism, be allowed to go?

HCE Sets Up Socioeconomic Forecasting Committee

*LD1602102993 Algiers Radio Algiers Network in Arabic
0800 GMT 16 Feb 93*

[Text] A committee of experts tasked with drafting an analytical report on the development of Algerian society has been formed. The committee, which was formed by decision of the Higher State Council [HCE], was set up yesterday by HCE Chairman Ali Kafi. It will include economists, sociologists, demography experts, statisticians, and specialists in sciences of politics, education, and communications.

The committee's task will be to prepare an in-depth study on the economic and social prospects for the next 10 years in light of analyses of the internal obstacles [to progress] and world economic developments.

Committee Chairman (Jilal Eliabes) defined the task to be carried out by the committee as aimed at thinking scientifically and in total freedom about drawing up a serious economic strategy and providing the appropriate political climate to serve the interests of future generations.

(Jilal Eliabes) pointed out that one of the responsibilities to be taken up by the committee, whose formation was an urgent demand of Algerian experts and researchers, is to think about the future of our country within a world environment that is incompatible with our aspirations to live in dignity and freedom.

New Party: PAGS Becomes ETTAHADI

*93AF0396B Algiers EL WATAN in French 24 Jan 93
p 3*

[Article by Khaled Mahrez: "ETTAHADI: A New Party"]

[Text] The Socialist Vanguard Party [PAGS] has become the "ETTAHADI" movement, the initials in Arabic for "progress, modernity, democracy." The special PAGS congress, which opened last Thursday and became the founding congress the following day, yesterday also elected a 51-member national transitional council and an 11-member transitional executive council, of which Mr. Hachemi Cherif, the PAGS's former coordinator, was unanimously elected secretary general.

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The statutes of the new movement adopted yesterday by the congress did not spell out strict organizational structures, given the transitional nature of its organization. It will be up to the next congress, which should be held about 18 months [from now], to give final shape to the most appropriate forms of organization.

Furthermore the congress adopted two organic and policy resolutions, which put the "ETTAHADI" movement "on the left," whose strategy line is to work to effect a two-sided break with Islamic fundamentalism and the "bureaucratic investment system." In his address to the congress on Thursday, Mr. Hachemi Cherif put equal emphasis on these two urgent needs, terming them "abominable evils." The congress, which concluded yesterday, sanctioned the break with Marxist-Leninist dogma that, according to Mr. Hachemi Cherif, did not make it possible for Algerian communists to be "in phase" with the social movement.

Although he had spoken of his pride at being an Algerian communist who completely absorbed the legacy of the worker movement in Algeria, Mr. Hachemi Cherif had posed a series of questions last Thursday about Algerian Communists' strategic errors from 1945 to today. "Why was the Algerian Communist Party [PCA] so seriously mistaken in its assessment of the essential character of the events of May 1945?"

"Why did it not play the role it should have had in the effort to move to a higher revolutionary stage in the movement for national liberation and the struggle for freedom?"

"Why hasn't this party, the PAGS, which has accumulated tens of years of experience, know-how, struggles, and sacrifices, been able to gain a greater audience and lasting power of influence and presence, and why in particular hasn't it helped alter the course of the political situation in the country at decisive moments and despite the historic opportunities with which life has supplied it? Why were we mistaken in identifying the historic stage, with all the consequences that arose out of it onto our political, economic, social, and cultural strategy and onto our alliances?"

"Why didn't we know and couldn't we break in time with petit bourgeois populism and socialism?"

"Why couldn't we learn all the lessons from the June 1990 election results in time and in depth, and, more generally speaking, why did we guarantee these elections and the authorization granted the totalitarian Islamic fundamentalist parties?"

The secretary general of the "ETTAHADI" movement answered none of these questions explicitly, but in itself his long speech Thursday was a response. Marxist-Leninism, once turned into dogma, did not allow Algerian communists to be "in phase" with the social movement.

Twenty-one members of the old PAGS leadership who totally disagreed with the dissolution of their party boycotted the congress. Some of them suggested that they might be thinking of creating a Marxist-Leninist party so workers could have political representation.

Third Quarter Figures on Economy Reported

Economic Activity Slows

93AF0368A Algiers EL WATAN in French 17 Jan 93
p 7

[Article: "Slowdown in Economic Activity"]

[Text] (APS)—Economic activity in Algeria slowed in the third quarter of 1992 due to the poor supply of factors of production and the low level of investment, which pulled commercial activity down in their wake, says the National Statistics Office (ONS) in its latest economic bulletin.

Total industrial production by all sectors excluding energy, mines, and quarries dropped by 1.5 percent in comparison with the same period the year before and by 11.6 percent compared to the second quarter of 1992.

On the other hand, the construction and public works industry showed "slight improvement" in 59 percent of the firms (up 10 percent over the previous quarter), thus confirming that industry's slow progress since the summer of 1991. According to the ONS, the only satisfaction comes from the agricultural sector, which repeated its 1991 performance, thereby slowing the increase in consumer prices—especially food prices.

In annual terms, the rise in consumer prices accelerated during the first nine months of 1992 to a level of 32.1 percent, up 10 points in comparison with 1991. The rise in industrial producer prices in the third quarter of 1992 was more moderate: up 7.3 percent compared to the second quarter and nearly 24 percent compared to the third quarter of 1991. In annual terms, the ONS reports a deceleration in 1992 following the sharp increases in 1991 (+76 percent).

As a result, the employment situation deteriorated during the same period, the effects being felt in all sectors of activity except services. The national public sector, excluding administration, lost about 8,000 jobs, or 2 percent in comparison with the manpower level as of the end of 1991. The employment market followed the trend by experiencing a drop in job demand, supply, and placements (-25.8 percent) and less job security in the positions actually created, since 63.7 percent of the jobs created were temporary.

Foreign trade moved downward from July through September 1992. In comparison with the previous quarter, exports were down by 15.06 percent, while imports fell by 5.6 percent. The drop in imports concerned primarily semimanufactures (-35.3 percent) and equipment goods (-13.48 percent). Despite everything, the trade balance remained favorable, according to the ONS.

Industrial Production 'Down'

93AF0368B Algiers EL WATAN in French 17 Jan 93
p 7

[Article: "Industrial Production Down"]

[Text] In the third quarter of 1992, industrial production excluding hydrocarbons experienced a drop of nearly 1.5

percent compared to the same period in 1991. This followed a slight increase during the preceding quarter, according to the National Statistics Office (ONS).

The drop was due to persistent difficulties in obtaining raw materials, of which supplies during the quarter were below the requirements expressed by the firms, particularly those in the manufacturing industry, the ONS explains.

The ONS also says that the favorable growth recorded in the second quarter of 1992 (1.74 percent) seems completely "exceptional" and is due basically to the low level of production during the second quarter of 1991 (which was affected in particular by the social disturbances being experienced by the country).

The annual rate of increase in industrial production excluding hydrocarbons for the first nine months of the year was noticeably lower in the case of the manufacturing industry, which recorded a drop of nearly 1.2 percent in terms of the rate recorded for the first six months of the year, the ONS adds. And it points out that difficulties in obtaining supplies, the disruptions caused by the various adjustments to producer prices, and the devaluation of the dinar were the main factors having a negative influence on production in all sectors of industrial activity.

The ONS also points out that besides inventory shortages, the rate at which production capacity was being used showed no improvement during the third quarter. In nearly 64 percent of the firms, it did not exceed 75 percent.

The cash situation did not improve for nearly 75 percent of the firms using bank loans, the ONS adds, and it emphasizes that 71 percent of the firms were unable to obtain loans from the banks because of their credit situation and their unappealing short-term prospects.

By sector of activity, it is noted that the energy sector recorded growth of nearly 5 percent during the third quarter of 1992 compared to the same period in 1991, thus maintaining a steadily increasing production level.

In the sector of mines and quarries, noticeable increases in production were recorded during the quarter in question, especially in the case of iron ore extraction (51.2 percent), salt extraction (18.7 percent), and phosphate production (12.1 percent).

With the exception of phosphate extraction, however, production levels were still very low and below 1984 levels, the ONS emphasizes, adding that the annual rate of increase in production for the first nine months of 1992 was estimated at nearly 2.7 percent.

For its part, the sector of iron and steel, metallurgy, engineering, and electronics (ISMME) was marked by a noticeable drop in production levels during the third quarter in comparison with the same period in 1991: down 4.6 percent following the favorable rates of growth noted during the first and second quarters. The sharpest

declines occurred in the case of electrical consumer goods (-39.2 percent) and electrical equipment goods (-42.5 percent).

According to the ONS, this was due to sharply reduced working time following the ENIEM [National Electrical Appliances Industries] firm's shutdown for technical reasons—the firm had difficulty obtaining supplies for some of its product lines.

In the case of the building materials, ceramics, and glass industry, production between July and September rose by nearly 11.4 percent in comparison with the same period the year before. The production of binder for road building increased by 37.4 percent, while the glass industry's production fell by 33.7 percent. The annual rate of growth for the sector as a whole was negative in the first quarter but reversed itself and turned positive by 2.8 percent in the third quarter compared to the same period in 1991.

All branches of activity in the chemical, rubber, and plastics industry experienced significant drops in production—estimated at 15.71 percent—during the third quarter of 1992. The only exception was paint manufacture, which was up by 39 percent.

The crisis in construction and public works and the sharp increases in producer prices in the case of that branch's products (200 percent higher in 1991 than in 1989) seem to be the main factors behind those contrasting developments.

In the case of the food industry, the results indicate a drop of 2.9 percent in the third quarter. The rate of annual production for the nine months was down 3.2 percent from 1991.

The decline in production affected all branches of activity except that of beverages and milk. There was also a slight recovery (4.8 percent) in the production of fats.

The higher prices for certain subsidized products and reduced imports, combined with fluctuations in consumption, explain that drop in production, according to the ONS.

In the case of the textile, leather, and footwear industry, there was a drop of 0.1 percent in the third quarter, but production by the textile sector, especially of intermediate textile goods, experienced [text illegible] in the annual rate for the nine months of 3.7 percent in comparison with the same period in 1991.

Leather and footwear continued to record sizable declines in production. There was a drop of 21.2 percent in 1992, and in the third quarter it amounted to 33.1 percent.

The ONS emphasizes that developments in those two sectors of activity only partially reflect the situation in production, since the private sector controls a significant share of the market. Production by the wood, cork, and paper industry during the first nine months was 13.4 percent below its level during the same period in 1991.

Concerning wood, and particularly carpentry in general, where the decline for the year amounts to nearly 18 percent, the crisis in construction and public works and higher producer prices were the main factors responsible for developments in that branch of activity.

Trade Surplus Figures

*93AF0368C Algiers EL WATAN in French 17 Jan 93
p 7*

[Article: "Trade Surplus"]

[Text] (APS)—Algeria's foreign trade during the third quarter of 1992 resulted in a trade surplus of 15.545 billion dinars, compared to 23.575 billion dinars during the preceding quarter, according to the latest figures published by the National Statistics Office (ONS).

Imports fell from 47.396 billion dinars in the second quarter of 1992 to 44.73 billion dinars in the third quarter for a drop of 5.6 percent, according to the statistics from the ONS. That drop is explained basically by the decline in imports of semimanufactures (35.3 percent) and equipment goods (13.48 percent) in comparison with the preceding quarter. There were increases in foodstuffs (25.5 percent), raw materials (19.03 percent), and consumer goods (12.2 percent) in comparison with the second quarter of 1992. Compared to the third quarter of 1991, imports in the third quarter of 1992 were up by 51.04 percent, an improvement affecting all the groups of products to some degree, but the sharpest increases were recorded in imports of foodstuffs and raw materials (respectively +101.8 percent, +112.6 percent, and +88.8 percent [as published]).

On the other hand, exports during the third quarter of 1992 were down by 15.06 percent from the preceding quarter, according to the ONS' economic bulletin, which notes that exports were 33 percent higher in the third quarter of 1992 than in the third quarter of 1991.

Exports of hydrocarbons, which account for 97 percent of the total, fell from 68.412 billion dinars in the second quarter of 1992 to 58.457 billion dinars in the third quarter. That drop of 14 percent is related to the decline in the value of the dollar during the third quarter and to the drop in crude oil prices.

No Fast Solution Reportedly for Housing Crisis

*93AF0396C Algiers EL WATAN in French 25 Jan 93
pp 1, 4*

[Article by Katia Debbouz: "Housing: Will the Vicious Circle Be Broken?"]

[Text] *Will the willingness demonstrated by the government to take charge of public housing and the rate of 250,000 assignments per year announced by the Housing Ministry be enough by themselves to unplug the bottleneck strangling all the partners in the construction industry?*

The budget bill for 1993 anticipates an allocation of 8.7 billion dinars, or a 365-percent increase when compared with the budget allocated to "housing" last year.

This amount of money, which will be set apart from the 200 billion [dinars] in the overall allocation earmarked for equipment, makes housing a "strategic" sector.

So public housing has again been put squarely on the agenda in the government's recovery plan.

But whatever the size of the agreed upon program may be, with an eye towards soothing tension over the building industry and with citizens, it should be noted that the housing and public works sector can only take off if all the other industries from which it draws its substance are doing well.

Housing, which is a huge consumer of industrial materials, is cost effective only in terms of job creation and added value, which is not to be sneezed at.

However, everything relating to the production of cement, iron, wood, and every other construction material is in a moribund state.

And because it is widely known that it is not possible to resort to massive imports, it is hard to believe there will be a quick solution to the housing crisis.

Besides, the watchdog agency that looks at construction materials, which is under the aegis of the Housing Ministry, anticipates huge hard-currency needs if the foreign trade market were to be opened up to housing and public works. Thus, \$1.3 billion would have to be unfrozen to satisfy the demand for materials for a two-year period. More precisely, these needs have been estimated by the watchdog agency to be 13 million metric tons of cement, more than 1 million metric tons of steel, more than 630,000 cubic meters of wood, and more than 648,000 cubic meters of plywood. All that given the facts that local cement production is derisory and that wood is entirely imported. The agency has nonetheless assessed its incompressible needs at the \$750 million mark. And that will allow but one part of the needed work to be done.

In addition, the deep crisis situation in which housing and public-work businesses find themselves does not suggest there will be a more or less immediate recovery in their activity, therefore the chancy character of [trying to] reduce the housing crisis.

Financing, the backbone [needed] to implement every project, is greatly compromised by the nonrecovery of debts owed construction companies by the state. The total of these debts, which add up to seven months of activity, means that the sector is "rich but poor."

It is this latter label that the banks are holding against the housing and public works [sector], to which credit is henceforth forbidden, the equilibrium of financial institutions notwithstanding.

For construction companies, this is just one more difficulty. Given shortages of materials that have now become chronic, stifling overstaffing, and "unsustainable" salary demands, the maneuvering room available to them is absolutely minimal. The last straw is when operating costs, which in theory are free and negotiable,

cannot (under a tacit agreement) be greater than 7,000 dinars. If it occurred to one of them to go beyond that limit, out of a concern for true prices, it would be out of business.

So how will 250,000 [units of] housing per year be assigned? That is the question over which the housing minister has invited all the players who know something in the area of construction to huddle as quickly as possible and to respond to within 10 days starting from the end of the one-day seminar on the housing business that took place Sunday.

To reassure entrepreneurs, the minister announced, here and now, that very soon a decree would be promulgated setting operating costs. Of course, he warned, those prices will have referential value only.

But the key to the problem, he added, remains cooperation as expanded to all the concerned parties. It is up to them to come up with recommendations and up to the center to do something with them.

Bread Shortages: Bakers Unable To Meet Demands

93AF0390D Algiers *EL WATAN* in French
15-16 Jan 93 p 12

[Article by Mourad Hadjersi: "Bakeries: Disturbing Shortages"]

[Text] The day will come when Algeria must import bread. As implausible as that prediction might sound, it seems to be well founded. The bread shortage is just getting worse. Bakers are no longer able to keep up with demand.

If it is after 0900 in the morning, you can forget about finding a loaf of bread. The bakers have drawn their curtains. The daily quota has been "liquidated." At the few stalls still open, people must wait in interminable lines to be served....

It is the ineluctable consequence of unbalanced development. In a 30-year period, the population more than tripled, while the number of bakery ovens stayed the same. A few statistics will make it clearer: The international standard is one bakery for every 2,000 inhabitants. Here, it is one to 5,000. At independence, Algeria had a total of 6,500 bakeries. Today the number is just about...6,500, which does not mean of course that there have been no new entrepreneurs in the sector. Quite the contrary: In the early 1980s, the authorities turned their attention to the matter and decided to import 1,000 bakeries, though only 600 ever opened their doors.

A decade later, the number has again fallen back to 6,500. "Business was never good," everyone in the industry agrees. Some bakers went into a different line of business. Others simply shut their doors. The Casbah was proud of its 85 bakeries, which year in and year out managed somehow to feed the inhabitants. This year, only 17 remain. Just recently, in downtown Algiers alone, 12 bakers have called it quits.

"It is time to take a serious look at problems in the industry," opines Mr. Ahmed Chaib, president of the bakery section of the UGCAA [General Union of Shop Owners and Craftsmen]. And there is no shortage of problems. According to the bakers' representative, "it is inconceivable that while the price of the raw material climbs by 100 to 500 percent, the price of bread increases no more than 50 percent." The profit margin does not seem large enough for bakers to eke out a living. In addition to the higher wages they must pay to workers, they note that the cost of their equipment has increased from 310,000 dinars in 1988 to 2,500,000 dinars today, a figure that discourages bakers from investing in equipment renovation. The trade union section approached the Ghozali government about these problems, and almost succeeded in getting a hearing. Almost, because midway through its meeting with the minister delegate for commerce, the latter found it necessary to interrupt the conference: The prime minister had just passed the baton to Belaid Abdesselam! Since then, the bakers have been treading water, waiting for something to happen. At times, they have been tempted to go on strike. But the trade union section is always there to put out brushfires before they spread. "Unfortunately, we won't be able to keep doing this indefinitely," say the bakers' representatives.

Costs of Fruit, Vegetables 'Soaring'

93AF0390E Algiers LIBERTE in French 23 Jan 93
p 14

[Article by D. Haberra: "Fruits and Vegetables: Whatever the Market Will Bear!"]

[Text] Surely one of the most terrible evils afflicting society is the soaring inflation that inexorably erodes purchasing power and unhinges even the best organized household budgets. The consumer is waiting to see what is next.

Since the country took its first very timid steps toward a market economy, Algerians have been buffeted from all directions by conflicting effects; as a result, managing one's living expenses has become a precarious undertaking plagued by vexing questions that seem to have no answers. On the ground, the prices being posted (or at least proposed), outrageous as they sometimes seem, are based on market imperatives; thus the scrupulous housewife trying to make ends meet finds refuge only in products that still benefit from government price support (dried vegetables, semolina, sugar, etc.) and that (fortunately) are not yet ripe for liberalization. The prices imposed by merchants with such exasperating impunity are perceived and resented as a direct attack.

Although prices of subsidized products may vary somewhat from shop to shop, prices for the others are determined by the chaotic interplay of opportunists of every stripe. So that plums, to take a typical Algerian fruit as an example, are marketed at prices beyond the reach of most consumers, with crops bought and sold long before the actual harvest, frequently two or three years in advance. This is the case with the orchards of Mitidja, on the Annaba plain, and with those in Chettia (Chlef). The

middlemen all tell market wholesalers the prices are high but justified. Retailers, on the other hand, demand rebates from the purchasing agents, not only in order to cut their costs but also to allow the advantages of competition to inure to the benefit of consumers and help rehabilitate merchants' reputations.

All the same, the popular discontent is not taken all that seriously by the authorities, least of all by the price and quality control bureaucracy. Anarchy reigns supreme, and it is difficult to guess what will become of Algerian consumers. The products being regulated are more than 90 percent local. As for market-set prices, there is no indication that business practices are being standardized, given the glaring absence of posted prices and the arrogance and rudeness of most vendors. The problem of fruit and vegetable prices is particularly serious. The modernization of techniques for cultivation (greenhouses) and processing (cold rooms) is certainly the main source of the problem. Especially when pimento is marketed at 120 Algerian dinars per kg while an apple that is still cold is offered for the same price. Until the specialized services (including those at the wilaya level) take charge of the situation, chances are we will have to make do on a diet of dried vegetables.

Suspension of Press Rallies Public Support

93AF0390B Algiers EL WATAN in French 20 Jan 93
p 1

[Commentary by Omar Belhouchet: "The Press and Democracy"]

[Text] The imprisonment of six EL WATAN journalists and the suspension of their newspaper have generated a spirit of solidarity—sincere, generous, broad, and intense—that has warmed the hearts of all our colleagues.

The support mobilized on behalf of the newspaper highlights the fact that we have arrived at an important crossroads in the country's political life, as it wrestles with the problem of designing a consensual model of society based on republican principles and democracy.

This means, in the first place, that in this new Algeria whose struggle to be born is attended with so much pain and suffering—even apart from theocratic, hegemonic visions and bureaucratic ambitions—freedom of the press is absolutely essential.

What the small journalistic community has lived through in these last two weeks is a serious test of that premise.

It has demonstrated, among other things, that the public has less and less sympathy for—and is becoming increasingly intolerant of—efforts by the regime to perpetuate its "authoritarian" relationship to the press.

The public's support for the EL WATAN staff suggests that the hitherto one-on-one nature of the sometimes brutal conflict between the authorities and the press is beginning to change.

Journalists are no longer alone in their struggle to defend freedom of the press. The Algerian people have made the struggle their own.

This is an indisputable reality, and certainly a great step forward for the Algerian people.

Does it also herald the emergence of a real civilian society, something the country has long been denied?

We cannot believe otherwise. In this domain, the EL WATAN affair has also been a veritable catalyst, bringing to light not only the pluralism essential to any real democracy but also the existence of currents of public opinion that support the kinds of changes needed to build a modern and forward-looking society.

The moral and physical tribulations endured by the six "prisoners," the damage sustained by the newspaper, and the suffering of the families have not been in vain.

APS Publishes New Monthly 'L'ECONOMIE'
LD2302143793 Algiers APS in English 1353 GMT 23 Feb 93

[Text] Algiers, Feb 23 (APS)—The Algerian mediatic landscape has been enriched with a new publication, "L'ECONOMIE" (THE ECONOMY), the first of a series of products of the Algerian News Agency (APS).

This monthly publication which is sold exclusively by subscription, has come to fill a space marked by a diminution of economic information as the number of specialized titles decreased and is limited in February 1993 to "PERSPECTIVES" and "LA VIE ECONOMIQUE".

The ambition of APS is to make of "L'ECONOMIE", "a tribune of expression and exchange of opinions" on the economic conjuncture. Thus, it intends to call for university specialists and company managers to decorticate [as received] the economic and social events.

It is worth recalling that APS already diffuses daily economic news whose gradual improvement is among the projects of the agency.

Military Maneuvers Broadcast on TV

93P50068A Algiers MAG 7 in French 7 Feb 93 p 3

[Text] Wednesday evening Algerian television broadcast a film report of the Algerian Army's military maneuvers, carried out by mechanized infantry units in the southwest region of Bechar, using air cover and heavy artillery. The maneuver was called "Jorf Tlata."

These maneuvers were part of the "normal annual preparation and training program" of the Algerian Army and were, according to Algerian television, designed to "test the combat capabilities" of the Algerian Army. Algerian television said that these maneuvers, which used real munitions, took place under the leadership of the Algerian joint chiefs of staff, Major General Abdelmalek Guenaizia and high-ranking Army officers.

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